POLS 2601: Social Science Research Methods

University of North Georgia
TR 2:00 – 3:15
Fall 2015

Professor: Glen Smith
Office: Strickland 106
Office Hours: TR (12:15 – 1:45pm) & Monday (12 – 4pm)
Email: glen.smith@ung.edu

Course Objectives

The primary objective of this course is to familiarize students with the standard practices of political science research. One goal of this course is to provide students with a basic understanding of the various approaches to studying political phenomenon. Understanding these approaches will allow students to critically evaluate the research conducted by other scholars. The other goal of this course is to provide each student an in-depth understanding of at least one method of empirical research. Which method(s) students use will depend on their academic interests and career goals. The purpose is of this requirement is for students to develop a practical skill that is useful in the particular career they intend to pursue. By the time students have finished this course, they should be able to:

1. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the common research methods used in political science research.

2. Critically evaluate the methods used in both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

3. Understand the common statistical approaches used to analyze both cross-sectional and longitudinal data.

4. Understand the ethical dilemmas involved in the implementation and analysis of empirical research.

5. Disseminate research findings through both oral and written communications.

6. Conduct high-quality research using at least one common approach to gather and analyze empirical data.
Course Requirements

Exams (400 Points)

There will be a midterm and a final exam, each worth 200 points. The exams will consist of a series of short essay questions concerning general approaches to research. The questions will correspond to the topics covered in class.

Quizzes (200 Points)

There will be five quizzes held throughout the semester. Each quiz is worth 50 points, and will require you to answer one or two questions from the readings required for that week. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped. The quizzes will test reading comprehension prior to class, so it is essential to keep up with the required readings listed in the course outline below. There will be no make-up quizzes, regardless of your reason for missing class.

Group Projects (100 Points)

You will participate in group projects throughout the semester. The projects require groups to complete tasks such as: developing research questions, creating empirical measures, and designing research studies. Projects will be graded on the effective use of course material and overall creativity. Students will be assigned to separate groups for each project, and each group member will receive the same grade.

Research Paper (300 points)

You will come up with a research design to answer an important question concerning political science. After identifying a topic, you will write a brief literature review discussing how past research has studied the question. You will then design a survey, experiment or content analysis to answer the question. The paper should be structured around the following sections.

Introduction (25 points)
What is the research question and why is it important? This should be no more than a couple paragraphs that clearly state the question, why it matters, and how it is relevant to political science.

Literature Review (25 points)
What did past research find on the question? How has past research attempted to answer the question? Students will need to identify the methods that are commonly used to answer their question or similar questions. Students will also critically evaluate how other scholars conducted their studies and analyzed their data.
**Theory and Expectations (25 Points)**
What do you expect to find? This section requires you to develop a theory regarding what results you are likely to find. You should not simply tell me your opinion, or guess what will happen. You need to base your expectations on some theory or multiple theories. Look to the articles we read in class for a model of what a theory section looks like.

**Methods (150 Points)**
What is the proposed method to study this question? What are the strengths and weaknesses to using this method, and how will they likely affect your results? What are the most accessible data sources? Discuss the instruments that will be used and evaluate their effectiveness in answering the question. All instruments you plan to use in the research must be presented in an appendix including coding sheets, survey questions and response options. You must discuss the decisions you made in your research design and the pros and cons of that decision.

**Reference Section (25 Points)**
The grade for this section will depend on consistency of in-text citations, and proper citations in the reference section.

**Presentation (50 Points)**

Each student will present their research proposal to the class, answer questions, and revise their proposal based on audience feedback. Presentations should take no more than 15 minutes and must address each of the first four sections listed above.

The length of the papers will vary depending on each student’s research question and writing style. The paper must be typed and double spaced using 12 point *Times* font with one-inch margins on all sides.

**Grading Scale**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>900-1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>800-899</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>700-799</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>600-699</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below 600</td>
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Other Information

Disruptive Behavior: Students who exhibit behaviors that are considered to obstruct or disrupt this class or its learning activities will be considered under the Board of Regents Policy on Disruptive Behavior. Behaviors which are considered to be inappropriate in this classroom include sleeping, eating, coming in late, interrupting others, talking out of turn, inappropriate behavior during group work, verbal behavior that is disrespectful of other students or the faculty member, or other behaviors that may be disruptive. Students who exhibit such behavior may be temporarily dismissed from the class by the instructor and may be subject to disciplinary procedures outlined in the Student Handbook.

Academic Misconduct: Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will fail the course and be subject to further disciplinary action by the university.

Supplemental Course Information: Students are responsible for accessing supplemental course information common to all courses at http://ung.edu/academic-affairs/policies-and-guidelines/supplemental-syllabus.php

Accessibility Statement: If you need this (or any other) course document in another format, please e-mail Andrew Eade at Andrew.eade@ung.edu or call 706-864-1628.

Outline of the Course

Week 1 (8/18 – 8/20)
-Introduction to the Scientific Process

Week 2 (8/25 – 8/27)
-Approaches to Empirical Research
-Terms and Concepts

Week 3 (9/1 – 9/3)
-Overview of Research Designs
-Comparative Method
-Group Project: Select Cases for Comparison

Week 4 (9/8 – 9/10)
-Qualitative Research and Case Studies
Week 5 (9/15 – 9/17)
- Interviews and Focus Groups
- Group Project: Design a Focus Group Study

Week 6 (9/22 – 9/24)
- Content Analysis
- Group Project: Create Coding Sheet and Instructions

Week 7 (9/29)
- Observation & Research Ethics
- Group Project: Justifying Observation Decisions

*Midterm Exam on Thursday October 1st*

Week 8 (10/6 – 10/8)
- Controlled Experiments
- Group Project: Design an Experiment

Week 9 (10/13 – 10/15)
- Field and Survey Experiments
- Group Project: Create a Treatment for the Field

Week 10 (10/20 – 10/22)
- Survey Design and Writing Questions
- Group Project: Write Questions and Response Options
**Week 11 (10/27 – 10/29)**
- Sampling and Statistical Inference
- Central Limit Theorem and Statistical Confidence
- Group Project: Reducing Non-response Bias

**Week 12 (11/3 – 11/5)**
Regression Models
- The Logic of Statistical Control
- Assumptions of Regression Analyses
- Group Project: Answer Questions Using Big Data

*Final Exam on Tuesday November 10th*

**Week 13 (11/12)**
Student Presentations

**Week 14 (11/17 – 11/19)**
Student Presentations

**Week 15 (12/1 – 12/3)**
Student Presentations

Final Projects due Tuesday December 8th at 3:00 pm.